



# SAINT ALBANS POLICE

**Neighborhood Watch  
TOOL KIT**  
*A Guide to  
Starting, Organizing & Maintaining  
Your Neighborhood Watch*

# Crime Watch Basics

## What is Neighborhood Watch?

A Neighborhood Watch is an organization that helps residents in a particular neighborhood prevent or reduce crime, develop a positive rapport with law enforcement, and become the "eyes and ears" for our police department.

At Neighborhood Watch meetings, residents discuss and plan potential solutions to address the area's crime problems. It is also a great way to meet and get to know your neighbors, which enhances everyone's safety in the neighborhood.

## Neighborhood Watch groups are organizations that:

- Teach citizens techniques to reduce the risk of being victimized at home and in public.
- Train citizens to recognize and report suspicious activities.
- Teach participants how to make their homes more secure and how to properly identify their property.
- Allow neighbors to get to know each other and their routines so that unusual activity can be reported and investigated.
- Bring citizens together to address the needs and issues that concern the entire community.

## Neighborhood Watch groups are not:

- Vigilante forces working outside the normal procedures of law enforcement.
- Programs designed for participants to take personal risks to prevent crime.
- A 100% guarantee that crime will not occur in your neighborhood.

## The leader of the Neighborhood Watch program is:

A block coordinator or captain that will:

- Organize "block" activities
- Distribute crime prevention and community information to members of the group
- Be the Point of Contact for the police department
- Represent their area or section at other Neighborhood Watch activities in the community
- Help distribute information about other types of activity taking place in your community.
- Complete a block map or roster containing first and last names, addresses, contact numbers and emails of all residents in their neighborhood

## **How Do I Start a Neighborhood Watch Group?**

You can easily start a Neighborhood Watch by following the steps below:

**Step 1:** Call the St. Albans Police Department and let them know you are interested in starting a neighborhood watch program. Discuss the types of crime or other issues that are prevalent in your neighborhood, and what type of neighborhood you live in (apartment, subdivision, rural homes, etc.).

**Step 2:** Compile accurate crime and disorder facts and intel.

**Step 3:** Contact your neighbors to find out who is interested. Visit them door-to-door. Going door-to-door is a great way to promote Neighborhood Watch, but TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU. Never walk door-to-door alone. When you talk to your neighbors, discuss crime and issues in your area, explain the value of the program, and determine a good time to schedule the first meeting. Keep a list of everyone's preferences and write down their comments.

**Step 4:** Plan a get-together (meeting) along with a representative from your law enforcement staff.

## **How Many People Do I Need to Participate?**

It can be as many people as want to participate where you live. The St Albans PD must officially recognize a Watch before signs in your neighborhood may be installed.

## **What are Neighborhood Watch Roles and Responsibilities?**

Roles and responsibilities within a Watch group can and will vary from neighborhood to neighborhood depending on availability of volunteers. Here are some examples you might consider.

### **1. Block Captain**

- *Coordinates* activities
- *Recruits* neighborhood residents into the Watch program.
- *Acts as a liaison* with the police department and the neighborhood
- *Distributes information* – use web, Facebook and email
- *Plans and conducts crime watch meetings* as needed
- *Develops communication systems* and maintains a phone/email tree

## **2. Block Watchers**

- *Acts as eyes and ears* for their neighbors and reports suspicious activities.
- *Checks neighbors' homes* when they are out of town
- *Cooperates and assists* the Block Captain.
- *Participates* in Operation Identification

### **How Much Time Do I Have to Spend?**

As much or as little time as you want.

### **How Can I "Sell" the Idea of a Neighborhood Watch To My Neighbors?**

**Tell your neighbors that:**

- Neighborhood Watch is a return to the "old-fashioned" days when neighbors took care of neighbors and communicated with police.
- The program helps reduce the risk of becoming a crime victim.
- It helps a community become stronger and more unified.
- It generates a concern of neighbors for each other. For instance, during bad weather, whether hot or cold, neighbors can check in on other neighbors.
- Neighborhood Watch lets neighbors know that someone will be there in case of a personal crisis such as a fire, flood, or crime.
- There is greater access to criminal activity information.
- It gives neighbors an opportunity to have block parties.
- It's an opportunity to beautify the neighborhood.
- Neighborhood Watch provides a forum for programs and an opportunity to meet officials in the community.
- It is a network of different neighborhoods working together.

### **How does my Law Enforcement Representative Help with a Neighborhood Watch?**

All crime prevention programs provided by your local law enforcement representative are FREE! Community presentations are available for almost any topic.

### **Are background checks conducted for participants in a Neighborhood Watch program?**

The St. Albans Police Department does not routinely conduct background checks on Neighborhood Watch members. However, any suspicious activity should be immediately reported to the St. Albans Police Department for investigation.

# The First Meeting

## Where Do I Have the Meeting?

Meetings can be held in a backyard, kitchen, basement, porch, or an apartment. If you think your group is too large to meet in a home, plan to have the meeting in a meeting room at the St. Albans Police Department, Public Library, local faith-based organizations or other facilities in the City or Town.

## How Do I Plan Our First Meeting?

(Check off as you complete the following):

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Set the date, secure a location and contact the St Albans Police Department to request a representative at (802)524-2166
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Hand out a flyer or send an email to all the members of the neighborhood. You can also attach a letter explaining the crime watch program in more depth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Publicize the meeting and create neighborhood interest. Post notices and flyers. Remember word-of-mouth is a great way to advertise
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Prepare an agenda with a list of the items that need to be discussed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Determine in advance time limits for each agenda item
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Plan on appointing a timekeeper for the meeting. A timekeeper can politely keep your meeting from running too long
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Estimate the number of families (people) in your neighborhood

## A Sample First Meeting Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions, Thank everyone for coming.
- Explain your reason for calling the meeting and discuss your reasons/concerns you and your neighbors have about crime in your area. (See examples below).
- Determine if there is enough interest in your area to start a Neighborhood Watch. Many believe that there should be at least 50% of residents in neighborhood participating in all meetings and activities to maintain a Neighborhood Watch. This isn't necessarily correct, but certainly should be your goal.
- Pass around a contact sheet on which everyone will write down their names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. This information will be put on a block map and distributed to everyone later.
- Determine date for next meeting, who will bring light refreshments, and whether children may attend. If your meeting is in a church, school, recreation center, etc., pre-arrange to use the facility roughly a month in the future, so the next meeting date can be announced at the initial meeting.
- Topic will be the basics of a Neighborhood Watch.
- Make a list of what topics the participants are interested in hearing about for future meetings.

## Reasons for Crime Watch

Discuss the concerns you have about your area such as the following (check all that apply):

- ☐ need for neighborhood association and sense of community
- ☐ over-turned garbage cans
- ☐ broken glass
- ☐ child safety
- ☐ elderly neighbors
- ☐ animal abuse
- ☐ animal noise issues
- ☐ loud music/noise
- ☐ prowlers
- ☐ code enforcement issues
- ☐ auto/property vandalism
- ☐ garden/garden supply theft
- ☐ hazardous traffic issues
- ☐ vehicle thefts/burglaries
- ☐ vacant buildings
- ☐ accumulation of hazardous junk in yards and alleys
- ☐ residential burglaries
- ☐ parking violation
- ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

After you discuss the concerns, determine if you and your neighbors really feel there is a need for a Neighborhood Watch.

## Some tips for a successful meeting

- Good lighting.
- Comfortable room temperature.
- Seating arrangement - a semi-circle usually works best since it enhances eye contact, and encourages better
- Interaction among members of the group.
- Inexpensive refreshments - **KEEP THESE SIMPLE!**
- Be sure to have a specific purpose and an agenda for each meeting. Some flexibility is necessary but do not ramble since it is confusing and boring to those attending the meeting. It is helpful to assign time limits for each agenda item as well as a time keeper.
- Hold the meeting to the announced time frame.
- Avoid "war stories", personal anecdotes, or "soap box" techniques since they can be misleading and disruptive to the meeting. Your law enforcement representative's time, your time, and the time of those attending the meeting needs to be carefully monitored.
- Briefly review key points discussed at the last meeting.

- Prepare materials in advance such as displays or crime prevention devices. Be sure displays are clearly visible and labeled for those present.
- No meeting should last longer than 60 minutes.
- If the speaker has no timepiece in direct view, be sure to indicate by a hand signal that time is almost up.
- Allow the speaker a chance to conclude remarks.
- Do not delay your meeting for the sake of "important" persons who have not arrived. Delaying a meeting can cause serious inconveniences for those already present who may have other commitments.
- Do not interrupt the meeting while those who are tardy make excuses for being late. Continue with your remarks.
- Share the bulk of the information. You do not need to lecture.
- Refer to prepared notes and index cards with clear, legible print. You do not need to memorize the material.
- If you plan to read directly from printed material, MARK the items with paper clips or markers so it can be found quickly. Fumbling is boring and time consuming and can lose attention.
- Say it just as you see it or as if you were talking to your own best friend.
- To avoid monotony, change pace by asking questions such as "Mr. X, have you ever considered what you'd do with this kind of problem?" Limit this though to avoid losing continuity.
- To keep interest, plan an activity such as filling out forms, pose a "problem" situation for discussion, or show slides.
- Arrange your agenda in units so that the meeting can end at any point. There is no way to determine exactly how much time it will take to cover certain material. Even if the meeting doesn't take the full amount of time, do not introduce a new topic that must be cut off before it is discussed in full.
- Do not cram too much into one meeting. Keep them relatively short. Everything will keep until next time!

## **Sample letter of invitation**

Use a letter of invitation in conjunction with flyer to promote the first meeting.

Dear Fellow Resident,

Neighborhood Watch is a very effective program to prevent many crimes such as burglaries, assaults and drug dealing. Neighborhood Watch promotes awareness that will help ensure the safety of you, your loved ones, and your neighbors.

I want to see if there is interest in starting a Neighborhood Watch group for our block (neighborhood?). I hope that you will join me at my house on [date] at [time] at [address]. Together, we can help keep crime off our block (out of our neighborhood?) for good.

Sincerely,  
[name]  
[phone number]

## **Neighborhood Watch in Action**

### **We've got a group going. What do we do now?**

The best thing about Neighborhood Watch is that it is so easy. Looking out for your neighbors takes very little time, and it benefits everyone.

#### **What to do:**

- Exchange basic information with trusted neighbors: home and work telephone numbers, daily routine of your family, planned vacations or visitors, scheduled deliveries and repairs, and your alarm system.
- Report any unusual or suspicious activities to the St. Albans Police by calling 524-2166.
- Make note of the descriptions of suspicious persons and vehicles. Write down license plate numbers and directions of travel. Take note of the color of the vehicle, what the suspicious persons was wearing, time of day, etc. Give as much specific information as possible.
- Keep trusted neighbors informed of houses that will be unoccupied for extended periods of time.
- Look after neighbors' houses when they are away. Volunteer to collect their mail, newspapers and other deliveries. A stack of several newspapers is a good indication to a burglar that no one is home!
- Consider an email, Facebook or voice mail system
- Consider establishing a regularly scheduled email newsletter.
- LET THE POLICE APPREHEND CRIMINALS. NEVER PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER.

### **What Are Suspicious Activities?**

If you detect any suspicious activity in your neighborhood or anywhere, call the St. Albans Police Department. Be prepared to explain what makes the behavior, person or circumstance suspicious.

In an emergency, when reporting an incident to the Coffeyville Police Dept., you may be asked to repeat the address. This is to ensure that the address is correct and understood. While the dispatcher is asking you questions, which may seem indirectly related to the actual incidence of the crime, such as your name and address, a patrol car has already been dispatched to the scene of the emergency. The additional information may be required in order to determine the need for more emergency equipment.

### **Care Enough to Call**

If any of the above situations deemed suspicious are observed, the citizen is advised to call the St. Albans Police Department and report:

1. What has happened
2. Where it happened
3. When it happened
4. Why is this suspicious
5. If anyone was injured



6. License number of suspicious vehicle
7. Description of suspicious vehicle
8. Description of suspicious persons
9. In what direction the suspicious vehicle/suspicious person went

### **What response to expect in regard to your call:**

If the crime is in progress, e.g., the burglar is still in your home or your neighbor's home, your call will be answered immediately.

If the crime has already been committed, e.g., you have come home and found your home has been burglarized, a slower response may be expected. The first priority in answering calls is for crimes in progress. Once these calls have been answered, the officer will go to the requested location.

## **What Else Do Neighborhood Watch Organizations Do?**

### **Identify Property**

The Identifying property with personal marks deters burglars, assists in arrest and prosecution of criminals, and facilitates the return of stolen property.

Guidelines:

- Mark valuables by inscribing your initials and a number. An example number could be the last four of your DL number. Jane Smith may have the DL number K99016009. So she could put: *JS6009*. DO NOT use your social security number.
- Complete two copies of a property list. Provide a description of the item, its make, model, size, color, serial number, purchase date and amount.
- Photograph, all valuables that cannot be marked (china, silver, jewelry, etc.) and file with the property list.
- List and file credit card companies, phone numbers and account numbers with the property list.
- Keep one copy of the property list at home, and another in a safe deposit box or other secure location.

### **Home Security Survey**

Crime prevention begins at home through improved home security. The St. Albans Police Department will conduct a home security survey on request. The survey will identify potential problem areas and will provide guidance for their correction.

Encourage your neighbors to:

- Improve the security of their residences.
- Identify any potential points of vulnerability.
- Correct those security weaknesses.

## **Participate in Neighborhood or Block Sponsored Events**

### **Suggested events**

- Have everyone in the neighborhood display their outdoor lights
- Block parties
- Cookouts or pot luck meals
- Request a visit by local police, rescue squad, fire department, etc.
- Flashlight walks
- Softball games
- Live music

## **Keep Your Crime Watch Active**

### **Keep Up the Good Work!**

It may be difficult to keep up the initial enthusiasm of the Neighborhood Watch group. As crime is lessened in your area, residents may become less interested in attending meetings, while still remaining concerned about crime.

Our local law enforcement officers will continue to provide assistance to the leaders of your group by having someone to attend your meetings when available and holding an annual Police Department sponsored meeting to provide updated information on Department activities, crime trends, and occasional guest speakers and training events.

Strong leadership is essential to maintain the active involvement of the community in the Neighborhood Watch Program. The program block captains, interested in the security of their neighborhood, are an asset in motivating the group to realize its objectives.

The block captains may get involved in training other block captains as well as a replacement should they move from the community. As crime is lessened within the community, citizens may broaden their scope to maintain the functioning of the group.

Residents may concern themselves with the total quality of living in their neighborhood, for example, home beautification, cleanliness of the neighborhood, parks and recreational development. Community pride may be a strong motivation in maintaining the program.

At all times, however, crime prevention should remain a priority of the program. The continued value of citizen involvement in protecting their neighborhood is the primary concern.

### **Guidelines to Maintain an Active Crime Watch Program**

- Schedule meetings every 90 days not to exceed 6 months between meetings.
- Be sure to give advance notice (about 30 days) of meetings.
- Review current crime trends in the area
- Update participants on new crime prevention techniques.
- Provide social interaction.
- Update current list of members.

## **How to Promote Meetings**

There are several steps a block captain can take to promote meetings, and you DO NOT have to do it alone!

- Delegate tasks to others in your neighborhood. If everyone contributes just a few minutes of their time, promotion is easy!
- Post flyers about a month ahead of the meeting. Get creative and make one of your own.
- Send an email to all your neighbors who have attended previously, suggest they bring a friend or neighbor.
- Call each person in the neighborhood a few days before the meeting to remind them. One person can call everyone in the neighborhood, or you can utilize a phone tree system.
- Recognizing that crime prevention is a serious issue, keep your meetings as positive as possible, so people feel good about coming.

## **Participate in Collaborative Organizations**

There are several opportunities for Neighborhood Watch groups to collaborate with other like groups within our overall community. Some links are provided below:

## **Social Functions**

Every function of your Neighborhood Watch group does not have to be a formal meeting. In fact, some of the most successful groups are those whose members get to know one another on a friendly level. Some examples that your group can sponsor are:

- Block parties/dances
- Neighborhood yard sales
- Movie nights
- Neighborhood clean-ups
- Adopt a neighborhood park or garden

## **Some More Important Numbers and Web Links:**

### **Stalbanspd.com**

St. Albans Police Emergency – 9-1-1

St. Albans Police Non-Emergency  
(802)524-2166

St Albans Fire Department  
(802)524-2132

St. Albans City Hall  
(802)524-1500

